DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 226 832 PS 013 367

AUTHOR Teleki, Jane K.; And Others
TITLE Parents' and Children's Reports of Parental Behavior in Divorced and Married Families.
PUB DATE Oct 82
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council on Family Relations (Washington, DC, October 12-16, 1982).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; *Birth Order; *Childhood Attitudes; *Child Rearing; Children; Discipline; Divorce; Fathers; Mothers; One Parent Family; Parent Child Relationship; *Parent Role; *Perception; *Siblings
IDENTIFIERS *Parent Behavior

ABSTRACT

The possibility that interfamilial and intrafamilial differences exist in children's reports of parental childrearing behavior was investigated. Subjects were members of 29 families in which divorces had taken place and 30 families in which marriages were intact. Each family had two children. Individual family members' responses to the 56-item six-scale version of Schaefer's (1965) Child's Report of Parental Behavior were obtained from 59 first-born and 59 second-born siblings, 29 divorced mothers, and 30 married mother/father pairs. Three dimensions of childrearing behavior assessed by the measurement instrument (acceptance, psychological control, and lax discipline) were the dependent variables for the study. For each dimension of parental behavior, analyses were computed for differences between divorced and married families and for differences between dyads within each type of family. Data from fathers in divorced families were not obtained. A major finding of this study was that children in both types of families reported both their parents as rating relatively high on the dimension of acceptance. For this group, then, there was no support for the stereotype that children whose parents are divorced feel rejected by their parents. Additional findings are discussed. (RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED226832

PS013367

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

PARENTS' AND CHILDREN'S REPORTS OF PARENTAL BEHAVIOR IN DIVORCED AND MARRIED FAMILIES

Jane K. Teleki, Ph.D. — School of Home Economics, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC 27834

Judith A. Powell, Ed.D. — Division of Home Economics, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY 82071

Denise L. Terrill, M.S. — College of Home Economics, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078

Paper presented in Research and Theory Section of Poster Session at Annual Meeting of National Council on Family Relations, Washington, DC, October 15, 1982.

PROBLEM

Children's perceptions of their parents' child-rearing behavior have been found to be more relevant determinants of children's behavior and adjustment than the actual child-rearing behavior of the parents. A child's perception of his/her parent's child-rearing behavior may vary as a function of birth order, parent toward whom child is responding, i.e., mother or father, and whether the child lives in a divorced or married family.

While a few studies have attempted to determine if differences exist in children's perceptions of mothers' versus fathers' child-rearing behavior, research dealing with perceptions of parental behavior have been limited almost entirely to children from married families. Seldom have comparisons been made between children's perceptions and parents' self-perceptions. Additionally, many birth-order studies do not control for age.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Jane K. Teleki
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Two questions were addressed in this study:

1. Do reports of parental child-rearing behavior differ as a function of membership in a divorced or married family (interfamily differences)?

2. Do reports of parental child-rearing behavior differ between dyads within the two types of families (intrafamily differences)?

Based on findings reported for previous research, differences were expected between divorced and married families. The following interfamily differences were assessed:

--first-born children's reports of divorced versus married mothers;

--second-born children's reports of divorced versus married mothers;

--first-born children's reports of divorced versus married fathers;

second-born children's reports of divorced versus married fathers;

--self-reports by divorced versus married mothers.

Since responses concerning parental behavior were obtained from both children for both parents and from parents relative to their second-born child, it was possible to address questions concerning differences between dyads within each type of family (intrafamily differences). Do children's perceptions of parental behavior differ from parents' self-reports of their parental behavior? Do mothers' self-reports differ from fathers'

self-reports? Do perceptions of parental behavior differ for first-born versus second-born children?

Analyses for first-born versus second-born children's reports have not yet been conducted. Also, in divorced families, responses were obtained only from the parent with whom the children were currently residing; i.e., the mother. Thus, statistical analyses for reports of children versus fathers and for mothers versus fathers within divorced families were not possible.

SAMPLE

Subjects were members of 29 divorced and 30 married two-child families drawn from a population of 450 families which were identified through contacts with religious and social organizations in a metropolitan area of northeastern Oklahoma. Responses were obtained from 59 first-born and 59 second-born siblings, 29 divorced mothers, and 30 married mother-father pairs. Each member of a mother-father pair responded individually.

The second-born child in each family was between 7 and 11 years of age ($\bar{x}$ = 9.1). The first-born child was older than the second-born but was not over 18 years of age ($\bar{x}$ = 12.3). Divorced mothers were between 31 and 45 years of age ($\bar{x}$ = 35.8); married mothers ranged from 32 to 43 ($\bar{x}$ = 36.5); and married fathers were between 32 and 48 ($\bar{x}$ = 39.2).

In divorced families the parents had been married from 2 to 16 years prior to the divorce ($\bar{x}$ = 10.7). The number of years as

a divorced family ranged from 1 to 9 ($\bar{x}$ = 4.7). In married families, parents had been married from 12 to 24 years ($\bar{x}$ = 15.2).

The estimated average annual income for divorced families was $16,600 while that for married families was $38,800. Twenty married families were two-earner families.

DATA COLLECTION

All subjects responded to the 56-item 6-scale version of Schaefer's (1965) Child's Report of Parental Behavior Inventory (CRPBI). The CRPBI was designed to assess parents' child-rearing behavior as perceived and reported by children. Children completed a separate report for each parent. They responded to items of the CRPBI in terms of whether a statement, such as "Enjoys doing things with me," was "Like," "Somewhat Like," or "Not Like" the parent for whom they were responding. Wording of the items was modified slightly so that parents responded in terms of whether a statement, such as "Enjoy doing things with child," was "Like," "Somewhat Like," or "Not Like" their child-rearing behavior toward their second-born (younger) child. Responses were scored 3 for Like, 2 for Somewhat Like, and 1 for Not Like.

The CRPBI yields scores for three dimensions of child-rearing behavior: Acceptance, Psychological Control, and Lax Discipline. Acceptance involves such traits as acceptance, child-centeredness, emotional support, and equalitarian treatment of the child. Psychological Control describes the degree to which

parents use covert, psychological methods of controlling the child's behavior. Lax Discipline refers to the degree to which parents establish and maintain limits (rules and regulations) concerning the child's activities.

The dimensions of Acceptance, Psychological Control, and Lax Discipline constituted the dependent variables for the study. Scores for each dimension were obtained by summation of unweighted scale scores identified by previous researchers as comprising that dimension (Armentrout and Burger, 1972a, 1972b; Burger and Armentrout, 1971; Burger, Armentrout, and Rapfogel, 1973).

DATA ANALYSIS

For each dimension of parental behavior--Acceptance, Psychological Control, Lax Discipline--analyses were computed for differences between divorced and married families and for differences between dyads within each type of family. Analysis of variance with repeated measures was used to assess

--children's reports for fathers versus mothers (within each type of family),

--first-born versus second-born siblings' reports for fathers/mothers (within married families), and

--fathers' self-reports versus mothers' self-reports (within married families).

A 2 x 2 (family structure x sex of child) analysis of variance model was used to determine whether or not differences existed between children's reports of divorced and married

fathers, children's reports of divorced versus married mothers, and self-reports by divorced and married mothers. Paired t tests were employed to assess differences between reports by children and mothers and by children and fathers. Independent sample t tests were used to determine if there were differences in first-born children's reports of parental behavior as a function of marital status of parents.

RESULTS

Differences between divorced and married families are reported in Table 1. For the dimension of Acceptance, there

---

Insert Table 1 about here

---

were no differences in reports of parental behavior as a function of membership in a divorced or married family. Children in both types of families reported both their parents as relatively high on Acceptance.

For the dimension of Psychological Control, school-age first-born children in divorced families reported their mothers higher than did school-age first-born children in married families, while second-born children in married families reported fathers higher on this dimension than did second-born children in divorced families. Perhaps in the father's absence, these 7 to 11 year old children assigned certain aspects of his child-rearing behavior to the mother.

Most differences between divorced and married families occurred for the dimension of Lax Discipline. Children in

divorced families reported their fathers as more lax in discipline than did children in married families. This difference appeared for teenage first-borns, school-age first-borns, and second-borns. Differences for mothers as a function of marital status were found only in reports of school-age first-born children. School-age first-borns in divorced families reported their mothers more lax in discipline than did school-age first-borns in married families. Moreover, divorced mothers reported themselves to be more lax in discipline than did married mothers. Except for the case of school-age first-borns, the differences in reports of parental child-rearing behavior between divorced and married families appears to be related to the fact that the father-disciplinarian no longer resides in the household.

To assess birth-order differences, separate analyses were conducted for families having teenage first-born children and those having school-age first-born children. All second-born children were school-age. In both divorced and married families having teenage first-born children, the second-born children reported their fathers higher on Acceptance than did their teenage siblings. This was the only intrafamily birth-order difference found to be statistically significant. Owing to the differences in ages, this finding may bear a closer relationship to age or developmental level than to birth-order.

All remaining differences that were statistically significant involved second-born children and their parents (Table 2). Parents reported perceptions of their own child-

Insert Table 2 about here

rearing behavior relevant to their second-born (younger) child. Data were analyzed separately for divorced and married families.

Within divorced families, there were no statistically significant differences for Acceptance; i.e., children perceived both parents as accepting even though the father did not reside in the household. For Psychological Control, second-born children in divorced families reported their mothers higher than their mothers reported themselves. For Lax Discipline, second-born children in divorced families reported their fathers higher than their mothers. Also, these children reported their mothers to be more lax in discipline than their mothers reported themselves to be.

Within married families, second-born children reported their fathers higher on acceptance than their fathers reported themselves. Second-born children in married families reported both their mothers and their fathers higher on Psychological Control than mothers or fathers reported themselves. For Lax Discipline, second-born children reported mothers higher than mothers reported themselves. Differences between mothers' and fathers' self-reports were not statistically significant.

Thus, in both divorced and married families, school-age children reported their parents higher on Psychological Control than parents reported themselves. Moreover, school-age children in divorced families reported their fathers higher than their mothers for the dimension of Lax Discipline.

SUMMARY

A major result of this study was the finding of no differences on the factor of Acceptance according to family structure. Children in both types of families reported both their parents as relatively high on Acceptance. For this group of children, there is no support for the stereotype that children whose parents are divorced feel rejected by their parents.

For the most part, differences between the two types of families involved children's reports of fathers on the dimension of Lax Discipline. Children in divorced families reported their fathers higher on Lax Discipline (i.e., less firm in discipline) than did children in married families. This result is consistent with the report by Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (1978) that divorced fathers of preschool-age children in their sample were not so restrictive as married fathers. Results of the current study extend this finding to school-age children.

The assumption might be made that in divorced families mothers take on more responsibility for controlling and disciplining the child. This did not appear to be the case for divorced mothers in our sample. Scores for children's reports of mothers were similar for the two groups on all three dimensions. Moreover, divorced mothers reported themselves to be more lax in discipline than did married mothers.

Differences in reports of parental behavior by children living in divorced and married families appear to be tied to one parent, the father-disciplinarian in this case, no longer residing

in the household. Whether or not it makes a difference if it is the mother or the father who no longer resides in the household has not yet been determined.

REFERENCES

Armentrout, J. A., and Burger, G. K. Children's reports of parental child-rearing behavior at five grade levels. Developmental Psychology, 1972, 7, 44-48. (a)

Armentrout, J. A., and Burger, G. K. Factor analyses of college students' recall of parental child-rearing behaviors. Journal of Genetic Psychology, 1972, 121, 155-161. (b)

Burger, G. K., and Armentrout, J. A. Comparative study of methods to estimate factor scores for reports of parental behaviors. Proceedings of the 79th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, 1971, 6, 149-150.

Burger, G. K., Armentrout, J. A., and Rapfogel, R. G. Estimating factor scores for children's reports of parental child-rearing behaviors. Journal of Genetic Psychology, 1973, 123, 107-113.

Hetherington, E. M., Cox, M., and Cox, R. The aftermath of divorce. In J. H. Stevens and M. Matthews (Eds.), Mother/Child Father/Child Relationships. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1978, 149-176.

Schaefer, E. S. Children's reports of parental behavior: An inventory. Child Development, 1965, 36, 413-424.

Table 1

Differences in Reports of Parental Behavior by Children and Parents in Divorced and Married Families

Subgroups	Factors		
	Accep-tance	Psych. Control	Lax Discip
Teenage first-born children's reports of mothers			
School-age first born children's reports of mothers		D	D
Second-born children's reports of mothers			
Teenage first-born children's reports of fathers			D
School-age first-born children's reports of fathers			D
Second-born children's reports of fathers		M	D
Mothers' self-reports			D

Note: A letter indicates a statistically significant difference ($p < .05$) between members of divorced and married families. D = average score higher for members of divorced families. M = average score higher for members of married families.

Table 2

Differences in Reports of Parental Behavior by Second-Born Children and Their Parents

Pair	Factors: Acceptance	Psych. Control	Lax Discip.
Within Divorced Families			
Children's reports for mothers versus father			F
Children versus mothers		C	C
Within Married Families			
Children's reports for mothers versus fathers			
Children versus mothers		C	C
Children versus fathers	C	C	
Mothers' versus fathers self-reports			

Note: A letter indicates a statistically significant difference ($p < .05$) between the pair being assessed. C = average score higher for children. F = average score higher for fathers. M = average score higher for mothers.